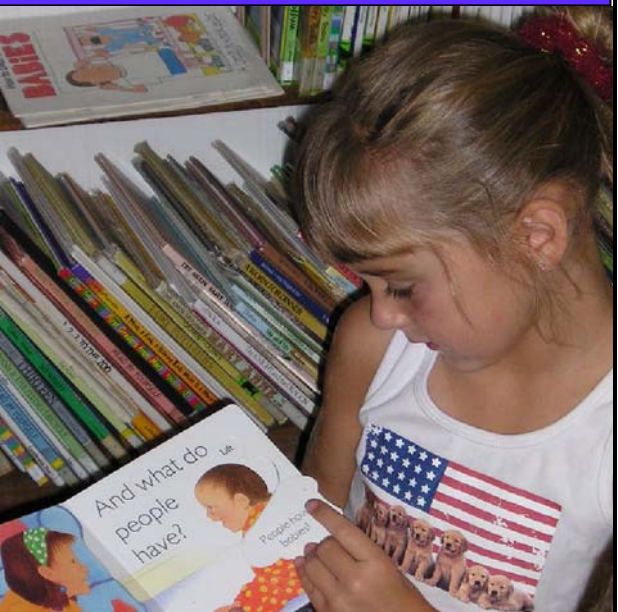




# **South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines**



**DRAFT - January, 2006**

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**Appendices**, including children’s booklists, resource books, and a grid comparing these standards to the Head Start Outcomes and SD Kindergarten standards can be found at  
<http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards>

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# INTRODUCTION

The early years of a child's life are of utmost importance and play a critical role in determining each child's future. Brain research has confirmed that experiences children have during the first five years of life form vital connections in the brain. These connections lay the foundation for all later learning and social/emotional development. The South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines were developed to provide a compilation of appropriate skills and knowledge children can attain with support by the time they have finished their preschool years. Children learn these skills primarily through play and experiences guided by skilled professionals. The Guidelines are designed to be used in all settings that include children 3 to 5 years of age, by preschool teachers, home and center childcare providers, Head Start staff, administrators, early childhood special educators, parents, librarians, and all who work with preschool-aged children.

Although these skills have been found to be achievable for most children by the end of their preschool years, each child is unique and has individual needs and characteristics. Children develop at individual rates, and variations in development are expected. Every child will not reach each of the benchmarks by the time he or she enters kindergarten. The guidelines are not intended to be a barrier to keep children from entrance to Kindergarten. Just as we help all children to be prepared to succeed in kindergarten, kindergartens and the entire K-12 system need to be ready to support all children, regardless of the skills or background knowledge with which they enter. The guidelines do, however, provide a list of skills and understandings that we can help children develop in order for them to start Kindergarten ready to succeed. Our goal is that all children will be provided with the opportunities to achieve their full potential. These guidelines can assist in designing curriculum for preschool children by outlining the goals for children to achieve. The guidelines have been aligned with the South Dakota Content Standards for Kindergarten, which are part of the K-12 State Standards. This alignment is designed to ensure a continuum of learning experiences from preschool to kindergarten and the elementary grades. Charts outlining this alignment are provided in the appendix.

The document has been written to provide support for professionals working with children from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This would include children who are learning English as a new language, children raised in bilingual environments, and children who speak English and are learning their native language. Benchmarks and suggestions are written to recognize the fact that the child's first language serves as the foundation for acquisition of other languages.

Assessing children's progress toward achieving the benchmarks should be done in ways that are developmentally appropriate for preschool-aged children. Standardized paper and pencil tests are not appropriate assessment measures for preschool children. Children's growth can be documented through collections of their work in portfolios. These portfolios could include work samples, drawings, samples of children's writing, photographs, and could include audio and/or video tape recordings. Observations of children should be made and recorded while children are engaged in play and daily activities. There are also several developmentally appropriate, systematic assessment tools that have been developed which can also be used to help assess children's progress toward meeting the benchmarks. These include the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum Assessment System, the

Preschool Child Observation Record from High/Scope, and The Work Sampling System. Contact information for these assessments can be found in the Appendix. Children's assessments and progress should be shared with families so they can support their growth as well.

The South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines were developed by a panel of professionals and parents from the early childhood community throughout the state, including: childcare, Head Start, private and public preschool, kindergarten, special education, university early childhood programs, state agencies, and representatives from the South Dakota Association for the Education of Young Children, the South Dakota Alliance for Children, and The South Dakota Early Childhood Council.

***South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines Panel***

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The panel wishes to extend special thanks to Marilou Hyson, Senior Advisor for Research and Professional Practice for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for her help in beginning the development of the guidelines and her continued guidance throughout the process.

Many resources were used in the creation of these Guidelines, including: "Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for Success" from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education; "Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children," the Joint Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and The International Reading Association; The Handbook of Early Literacy Research edited by Susan Newman and David Dickinson; The Creative Curriculum for Preschool and The Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum Assessment System, developed by Diane Trister Dodge, Laura Colker and Cate Heroman; "A Framework for Early Literacy Instruction: Aligning Standards to Developmental Accomplishments and Student Behaviors" by Elena Bodrova, Deborah J. Leong, Diane E. Paynter, and Dmitri Semenov; Engaging Young Children in Mathematics: Standards for Early Childhood Mathematics Education edited by Douglas Clements, Julie Sarama, and Ann-Marie DiBiase; The Emotional Development of Young Children: Building an Emotion-Centered Curriculum (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) by Marilou Hyson; The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework; other national reports; research; and preschool standards from many states.





## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*The following principles and beliefs about how young children develop and learn, outlined by the South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines Panel, served as guides throughout the development of this document.*

1. All children are capable, competent and actively seek to comprehend the world in which they live.
2. Families are recognized as children's first and most important teachers.
  - ❖ Families are respected and supported in the nurturing and development of their children.
3. Children are members of communities that value and support their development.
4. Teachers/Caregivers play a critical role in supporting and promoting children's development and learning.
5. All children acquire knowledge and values through relationships with families, peers, and other adults.
6. Children's development reflects their cultural, linguistic, individual, family, and community diversity. Early childhood environments honor, respect and support the child's culture, language, family and community throughout the curriculum.
7. Young children learn through play and active exploration of their environment. They need large blocks of time to actively engage in a variety of activities.
8. Expectations for children must be guided by knowledge of children's growth and development.
  - ❖ All children's early learning and areas of development interact and influence each other.
  - ❖ Children generally acquire skills in a sequential order.
  - ❖ Development can be influenced by the support and experiences adults provide.
9. All children are unique in their development and progress at different rates. Early childhood professionals must assess each child's development and provide experiences that nurture the individual needs of each child, helping them to progress in all areas.
10. Children's social and emotional competence is an essential foundation for all later learning.
  - ❖ Children's acquisition of social skills is essential and can be embedded in all areas of development.
  - ❖ Children's self esteem is a vital component to developing a healthy, competent individual.
  - ❖ Problem-solving skills help children in all areas of development and can best be acquired through everyday experiences.

# ORGANIZATION OF THE DOCUMENT

The core of this document is a set of guidelines for preschool children in the areas of literacy, mathematics, social-emotional development, approaches to learning, science, health and physical development, social studies and the arts. These areas are all inter-related. Guidelines in one area help to support growth in other areas of development. Each major area contains:

**Standards** which are general statements that represent the information and/or skills that children should know and be able to do.

Each Standard area contains **Benchmarks** which are sub-components of standards that describe what children should know and be able to do at specific developmental levels, which in this case is at the end of the preschool years, usually at the age of five, upon Kindergarten entry.

Each of the Standard areas includes ideas on how to set up the environment, or room, to enhance play and learning. There are also teaching suggestions that can be used by all who work with young children, including families. Although all children can learn from these activities, there are additional adaptations for individual learners. These individual learners will include children with special needs and any other children who will benefit from modifications in order to learn successfully. All children will be able to benefit from many of these suggestions. The Language and Literacy section includes benchmarks and suggestions for bilingual learners. This would include children who are learning English as a new language, children raised in bilingual environments, and children who speak English and are learning their native language. The term “bilingual learners” has been used throughout this document to refer to these children to be more inclusive of all children in South Dakota. An additional list of activities that parents, guardians and other family members can do at home may be found in the Appendix. The *Helpful Terms* section at the end of this document contains definitions that may help in the use of this document. The appendixes contain a chart listing the standards and benchmarks, which shows their relationship to the Head Start Outcomes and the South Dakota Kindergarten Standards. There is also a list of resources and websites and a booklist of recommended children's books that will enhance children's learning.

# **SOUTH DAKOTA EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES FOR LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**



The South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for Language and Literacy are based on research regarding the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that lead children to be successful readers and writers. Research has indicated that successful young readers and writers have characteristics in common:

- 1) They have Phonological Awareness (including the ability to hear and distinguish individual sounds in spoken words and the ability to rhyme);
- 2) They understand the Alphabetic Principle (the concept that the sounds of speech can be represented by one or more letters of the alphabet), and have letter name knowledge;
- 3) They have good vocabulary, including good oral language comprehension and the ability to use words to express themselves;
- 4) They can comprehend or understand what they read;
- 5) They have good fluency;
- 6) They use invented spelling;
- 7) They have interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes.

The South Dakota Guidelines for Language and Literacy will help children develop these characteristics. Children will become more successful readers and writers if we help them develop an interest and enjoyment in books, reading, and writing, in addition to acquiring skills and strategies. The Guidelines are designed for children 3 to 5 years of age, prior to kindergarten entry. The guidelines are aligned with the SD Kindergarten Content Standards in Language and Literacy.



### Learning New Languages

Brain research has been very clear that learning new languages is much easier if we begin early in life. During the first years of life connections are being formed in the brain that allow learning to take place. When children hear the sounds of language they form connections in the brain that allow further learning in that language to take place. If children do not hear a language in the early years and form these connections it will be much harder for them to learn it later. The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages and the Center for Applied Linguistics list several **Benefits of Being Bilingual** and state that:

**“Learning a second language at an early age...**

- Has a positive effect on intellectual growth.
- Enriches and enhances a child's mental development.
- Leaves students with more flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to language, and a better ear for listening.
- Improves a child's understanding of his/her native language.
- Gives a child the ability to communicate with people s/he would otherwise not have the chance to know.
- Opens the door to other cultures and helps a child understand and appreciate people from other countries.
- Gives a student a head start in language requirements for later education.” ([www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)).

When considering teaching a new language, think about which language is most appropriate for your children and community. If there are a large number of Spanish speakers in the community, Spanish would be a natural choice. Ideally, you could teach a few words in other languages as well, such as French or German.

This section also contains benchmarks for children who are learning English as a new language. As we help children learn English, it is important that we support their home language and let children and families know we respect their home language. Children’s first language supports the learning of a new language.

### South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for Language and Literacy

#### **STANDARD 1 ~ Reading**

Children use skills and strategies to get meaning from print.

#### **STANDARD 2 ~ Writing**

Children use writing and drawing as a means of communication.

#### **STANDARD 3 ~ Listening and Phonological Awareness**

Children listen, identify and respond to environmental sounds, directions and conversations, and have phonological awareness.

#### **STANDARD 4 ~ Speaking/Communicating and Oral Language Development**

Children successfully communicate for multiple purposes.

#### **STANDARD 5 ~ Learning New Languages**

Through their explorations, play, and social interactions children demonstrate an understanding that there are multiple languages, and can communicate with a few words in a language other than their home language.

# Reading

## STANDARD 1 ~ Reading

Children use skills and strategies to get meaning from print.

### Benchmarks

1. Demonstrates motivation, interest and enjoyment in books, reading, and acting out stories while engaged in play.
2. Demonstrates book-handling skills, such as holding a book right side up and turning pages from front to back.
3. Recognizes familiar environmental print, such as "STOP" signs, and realizes it has meaning.
4. Retells a story from a familiar book and relates it to real life experiences.
5. Makes predictions of next steps in a story.
6. Demonstrates knowledge that a symbol can represent something else (e.g. a word can stand for an object, a name for a person, a picture for the real object.)
7. Recognizes own first name in print.
8. Demonstrates knowledge of the Alphabetic Principle, the concept that the sounds of speech can be represented by one or more letters of the alphabet.
9. Identifies 5-10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in own name.
10. Demonstrates knowledge of the basic concepts of print, such as knowing the difference between pictures, letters, and words.

### *Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- To develop the skills and strategies of successful readers children need to have an environment filled with age appropriate reading materials, including both fiction and informational books, as well as magazines, charts, poems, and other engaging print that reflect the cultures of the children.
- Set up centers and areas that allow children to be actively engaged in literacy, including a cozy library/book area where reading is enjoyable, a writing area with a variety of paper, pencils, crayons, and markers; a listening area with books on tape or CD; a housekeeping area with notepads, pencils and books; and a computer if available.
- Post songs, poems, a schedule with the daily routine, etc. on charts or large paper using words and symbols and point to the words while singing and reading.
- Provide meaningful print in the environment. Allow children the opportunities to help label meaningful items, storage areas/containers, or designated spaces using pictures, symbols or print. Pictures and names of toys can be kept on shelves to show where they belong. Use children's names and photos to label their cubbies/personal spaces/pictures, etc.
- Add many hands-on materials to various centers throughout the environment, including magnetic letters, alphabet blocks, and materials children can use to form letters, such as play dough and pipe cleaners.

### ***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Provide time in the daily schedule for large and small group activities, and large amounts of time for children to select from a variety of activities at centers or interest areas.
- Involve children in regular story time experiences which include exposure to books, finger-plays, poems, songs, rhymes, puppets, dramatic play, repeated reading of familiar text, and acting out familiar stories.
- Encourage children to read repetitive, familiar parts of stories in simple, predictable books, which have only a few words on each page, like Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?
- Ask children to predict what a story might be about after showing them the cover of the book; during the story occasionally ask them to predict what might come next in the story.
- Talk about the “beginning” and “end” of books. Run your finger under words as you read them so children can see that reading proceeds from left to right.
- Demonstrate your own enjoyment, interest, and motivation to read in a variety of ways, showing children that reading is fun and useful.
- Read high-quality books to individuals and small groups, making sure they are non-stereotypical and reflect children's interests, culture and home language.
- Frequently read and sing with books like Mary Had a Little Lamb and The Wheels on the Bus that contain words to songs. Sing the alphabet song while pointing to the letters.
- Engage children in making books that they can read independently. Children can collect pictures of familiar brand names (such as the front of cereal boxes), photos of children in the group with their names, photos of familiar signs, cultural events, etc. These books can be made from photo albums or stiff paper stapled together.
- Talk about some of the interesting words found in books as you read to children to help build their vocabulary.
- Point out sounds of letters in familiar words, such as letters in the child's name or in the title of a favorite book.

## Writing

### **STANDARD 2 ~ Writing**

Children use writing and drawing as a means of communication.

#### **Benchmarks**

1. Demonstrates motivation to draw and write during play, experimenting with writing tools, such as pencils, crayons, markers, and the computer keyboard.
2. Demonstrates understanding that their spoken words can be represented with written letters/symbols as they dictate.
3. Uses scribbling and drawing to represent their ideas, then begins to use letters and developmental/invented spelling of words to communicate a message.
4. Attempts to write own name using a variety of materials.
5. Uses environmental print (such as signs, labels on food, and general print around them) to help in their writing, and asks adults for help in writing messages, stories, etc.

### ***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Create a writing center/writing area with writing tools such as stamps, paper, envelopes, writing tablets, alphabets, over-sized paper, a typewriter, crayons of various sizes and shapes, and other writing materials.
- Provide pencils, markers, crayons, paper, chalk, chalkboards, computer keyboards, stencils, and rubber stamps with washable ink in centers/interest areas throughout the room, including the block area, dramatic play area, art area and others.
- Provide centers where children can experiment with writing letters and words in shaving cream, salt, play-dough, etc.
- Occasionally change the dramatic play area into a post office to encourage children to write to parents and other children.
- Label common objects in the room and items children bring to share from home.

### ***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Model writing whenever possible for students, such as during attendance, lunch count, making lists, writing reminders, noting changes on a message board or writing other messages.
- Think out loud as you write with the children so they can understand the process you go through to write. Say letters out loud as you write them from time to time.
- Demonstrate your own enjoyment, interest, and motivation to write for a variety of reasons, such as making lists, showing children that writing is fun and useful.
- Provide dictation opportunities such as "What would you like to say in your card to your mom?" or "Tell me what you like to do outside and I'll write it down." Read the writing back to the child to strengthen the connection between the printed and spoken word.
- Offer shared writing experiences to small groups of children, writing down their ideas on a large piece of paper for all to see, with ideas such as "Let's make a list of things we saw on our field trip." Take pictures of the experiences and write captions to go with the pictures or compile pictures to create a book.
- Write songs and poems on charts with the children to share while singing and reading.
- Write the child's name on artwork and encourage them to write their own name.
- Encourage children to dictate titles for their artwork and/or write short stories to accompanying their artwork.



# Listening and Phonological Awareness

## **STANDARD 3 ~ Listening and Phonological Awareness**

Children listen, identify and respond to environmental sounds, directions and conversations, and have phonological awareness.

### **Benchmarks**

1. Listens and responds to conversations with adults and other children during play.
2. Identifies sounds and words in the environment.
3. Listens attentively to books and stories.
4. Can repeat familiar songs, rhymes, and phrases from favorite storybooks.
5. Demonstrates understanding of an increasingly rich vocabulary.
6. Follows simple directions with two or more steps.
7. Recognizes some rhyming sounds.
8. Demonstrates the ability to hear individual parts of words and can separate the parts using clapping, finger snapping, or other movement (e.g. clapping out each syllable of pup-py, di-no-saur.)
9. Identifies words that begin with the same sound from a small group of words.
10. Can repeat spoken words when requested.

### ***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Set up a listening area/center where children can listen to books on tape, music, etc.
- Play a variety of music, including multicultural and children's songs and taped environmental sounds.

### ***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Read a variety of culturally diverse books, poems, and nursery rhymes with children.
- Provide experiences that expand children's vocabulary, such as field trips and sharing interesting objects.
- Provide a variety of opportunities for children to talk listen to each other.
- Play clapping games to help children be able to hear and identify separate sounds/syllables in words, such as clapping with the sounds in their name *Ma-ri-a*. Use musical instruments to play individual sounds heard in the words of songs.
- Play games that focus on the beginning sounds of words, words that start with the same sounds, as well as words that rhyme.



# Speaking/Communicating and Oral Language Development

## STANDARD 4 ~ Speaking/Communicating and Oral Language Development

Children successfully communicate for multiple purposes.

### Benchmarks

1. Plays with the sounds of language, repeating rhymes, songs, poems and fingerplays.
2. Uses an increasingly rich vocabulary.
3. Demonstrates motivation to communicate in play and every day activities.
4. Provides meaningful responses to questions and poses questions to learn new information or clarify ideas.
5. Uses complete sentences of varying length to express ideas and feelings through spoken language, sign language, or other forms of communication.
6. Initiates and engages in conversation and discussions with adults and other children.
7. Tells real or imaginary stories that have a recognizable beginning, middle, and end.

### *Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Provide a dramatic play area where children can pretend and role-play.
- Play CDs or tapes of children's songs, including songs from various cultures, while children are playing in centers or interest areas; occasionally sing along and encourage children to join you.

### *Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Engage children in conversation while at play. Listen attentively; don't rush children's speech. Follow children's lead in the conversation.
- Expand on children's language (child says "ball", respond with "right, big, red ball" etc.)
- Explain the meaning of words during conversations and story time.
- Encourage children to retell and act out stories you have read together.
- Talk about things you are doing and the child is doing. Think of interesting words to describe details and actions. For example, if you are pretending to wash dishes, you might talk about *scrubbing* and *scouring*.
- Provide opportunities for children to talk to others, such as a sharing time, lunch and snack times, using smaller groups to allow for more meaningful conversation.
- Ask questions about books and stories.
- Use enjoyable books, poems, rhymes, fingerplays and songs that children can repeat frequently.
- Give children opportunities to play with sounds. Provide experiences with "stretching out" words by saying them slowly sound-by-sound.

# Learning New Languages

## **STANDARD 5 ~ Learning New Languages**

Through their explorations, play, and social interactions children demonstrate an understanding that there are multiple languages, and can communicate with a few words in a language other than their home language.

## **BENCHMARKS**

1. Can name at least one example of a language other than their home language.
2. Can say simple greetings in another language, such as “hola” (hello) and “adios” (good-bye) or use sign language to express a greeting.

### **For a child learning English as a new language:**

3. Listens to peers and adults speaking in English to learn new information, and shows some understanding of the language.
4. Engages in nonverbal communication with those who speak a language other than their native language.
5. Plays with the sounds and intonation of the English language as well as their home language.
6. Identifies names of common objects in the environment.
7. Uses simple words and phrases to communicate with adults and other children.

## ***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Learn New Languages***

- Set up the room to help children learn a new language. In the listening center provide books on tape or CD in other languages. You can also provide CDs or tapes that have simple songs and phrases in multiple languages. These are available on-line or in teacher supply stores. Ask volunteers, parents, or older children to record stories for the children to listen to, including the home languages of the children.
- Label objects around the room in both English and another language, such as Spanish or Lakota. Make labels with the children large enough to be easily read, adding one word a week.
- Add books to the library area that are written in two languages. Read books like Goodnight Moon, which is available in English and Spanish; this can help children to see the connection between the two languages. Provide books that reflect the languages and cultures of the children in the room.

### ***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Invite parents and members of the community who speak other languages to come in and teach children a simple song and a few greetings or special words. Invite families to cook traditional dishes with the children and teach them the names of the foods they are preparing. Be culturally sensitive to parents; invite but do not push them to come until they feel comfortable. Instead work on building a relationship over time.
- Teach children a simple greeting, such as \_\_\_\_\_ (Lakota Greeting) “hola” (hello in Spanish). Then use this greeting with the children in the morning. Encourage them to greet you and the other children the same way.

Expand this greeting to include “How are you?” ¿Cómo estás? (in Spanish)

And responses that could include:

excelente	excellent
muy bien	very good
bien	good
mal	not good

and you?      ¿y tú?

- Teach color words and numbers in other languages (such as \_\_\_\_\_ in Lakota).
- Sing simple songs in other languages, such as *Fere Jacques* in French, which will help children, hear the sounds of the language.
- Another song to sing throughout the year with the children is:

*It's a Small World*

Es (Its) un mundo (a world) entre nosotros.

Es un mundo entre nosotros.

Es un mundo entre nosotros.

Es un mundo entre nosotros.

- Use motions to go along with songs to help children learn the words.

### ***Additional Strategies for Children who are Bilingual Learners***

- ❖ Build relationships between parents and teachers so that children feel safe, secure, and comfortable. Involve families in all aspects of the program, helping children learn about each other's cultures. Emphasize the importance of reading to children at home.
- ❖ Encourage parents to continue to speak to the child in his/her native language at home. Knowing their first language well will help them later in English language and literacy development.
- ❖ Help children acquire book knowledge and appreciation, print awareness, and phonological awareness in the language with which they are most proficient, drawing on family and community members as resources. These skills will transfer as children become proficient in other languages.
- ❖ Provide activities for children that help facilitate interactions between children learning the new language and those who speak the language well, but do not require them to speak until they are comfortable (safe havens), such as a table with toys and puzzles, a book area, or block area.
- ❖ Learn a few words in the child's home language, and if possible, have a staff person available who can speak the language of the child.

- ❖ Invite parents and family members to come in to read to children in their home/native language. Involve families in engaging children in oral traditions and cultural experiences such as story telling and puppetry in their native language, as well as English.
- ❖ Ask volunteers, parents, and older children who speak the child's language to write down stories the child dictates in his/her own language.
- ❖ Use songs to help children learn new phrases and sentences, such as a "good morning" song.
- ❖ Use simple sentences, repeat what is said, use gestures and facial expressions, point to objects and use everyday vocabulary to help children clearly understand what is said.
- ❖ Focus on helping the child learn new words in English that are useful, simple, and will help the child meet his/her needs. Describe your everyday actions aloud as you do them.
- ❖ Do not force children to produce language until they are naturally willing to do so.
- ❖ Create a buddy system. Ask a child who speaks the language well to be a buddy to a child learning the language. Explain to the child how she/he can play with, talk with, and support the child learning the language.

### *Adaptations for Individual Children*

- Ensure all children accessibility to books and materials in the environment.
- Keep hard cover board books (which have sturdy cardboard pages) on shelves where children can have easy access.
- Use computers with touch screens and interactive programs, such as "Living Book" software.
- Provide interactive books that allow children to push buttons to hear sounds in the story, and books with textures to feel. Consider adding textures to books such as fuzzy fabric scraps to books about animals.
- Use large print books.
- Use adaptive writing tools when needed, such as:
  - Oversized pencils/crayons/markers or sizes that meet the child's needs;
  - Rubber pencil grips that fit over pencils or other adaptations to the writing utensil;
  - Adapted keyboards, such as IntelliKeys, or voice recognition software.
- Use different textures of paper to write on, including sand paper and very heavy paper.
- Provide opportunities for children to explore writing in a variety of materials, such as sand, corn meal, shaving cream, and paint.
- Writing on a slanted surface helps many children; a large binder on a table can create a slanted surface. Easels, writing on the wall (vertical surface) are good tools.
- Teach children a few basic words in Sign Language and use with familiar songs and phrases.
- Provide page-turning devices and book stands to hold books in place for children who need them. These can be purchased or make from household materials.
- Encourage volunteers from the community to assist in reading stories to individuals and small groups.
- Use photos of the child doing the routine activities of the day to help those who have difficulty with understanding directions.
- Teach children simple words and phrases in sign language and use with familiar songs and phrases.
- Provide communication devices, such as communication boards that have pictures the child can press or point at to communicate wants and needs.
- Use transitions between activities such as songs, sign language and fingerplays.
- Provide plastic toy phones (which can be made from plastic PVC pipes and corners) that allow children to hear themselves speak, providing immediate feedback.
- Do activities in small groups and individually.
- Pass around a "Talking Stick" or other interesting item that can be used as an indicator of whose turn it is to talk or share.
- Give children plenty of time to think about and formulate what they want to say.
- Provide opportunities for children to talk in front of a mirror so they can see the movement of their mouth and the sound they are making together.
- Provide interpreters for children with hearing impairments or those who do not speak English.
- Have sandpaper letters available for children.
- Provide individual dry erase boards for children to write on.
- Use many concrete, hands-on visual materials when helping children learn new words.



# **SOUTH DAKOTA EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES FOR MATHEMATICS**

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are needed to see this picture.

The South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for Mathematics are based on current research regarding the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that lead children to be successful in using mathematics. In their position statement on Early Childhood Mathematics, The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have several recommendations for high-quality mathematics education for three-to-six-year old children which include: providing time and materials for children to engage in play; enhancing children's natural interest and curiosity in mathematics and their disposition to use it to make sense of their world; providing adult support; building on children's family, linguistic and cultural backgrounds and experiences; encouraging children's problem solving and reasoning through integrated activities; providing for sustained interaction with mathematical ideas; and continually assessing children's mathematical knowledge and skills.

It is critical to provide early experiences that will help both girls and boys develop a positive attitude towards mathematics and self-confidence in their ability to solve problems. We can build on the various experiences children have had before preschool, and help them understand that they already know a lot about mathematics. We can help children learn mathematical concepts by talking with them, demonstrating with hands-on materials, and encouraging them to talk about the concepts with their peers and us, all in the context of play. Children learn geometry skills as they play with blocks; they learn about volume and measurement by playing in sand and water. They learn one-to-one correspondence as they help to pass out snacks to each child in the group. Through the experiences we provide for children, they can come to truly enjoy mathematics.

The primary resources that were used in the development of these guidelines were Engaging Young Children in Mathematics: Standards for Early Childhood Mathematics Education, edited by Douglas H. Clements and Julie Sarama and resources from The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and The National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The Guidelines are designed for children 3 to 5 years of age, prior to kindergarten entry.

### **South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for Mathematics**

#### **STANDARD 1 ~ Number Sense and Operations**

Children count with understanding; and use numbers to tell how many, describe order, and compare.

#### **STANDARD 2 ~ Shapes/Geometry**

Children identify and describe simple geometric shapes (circle, triangle, rectangle) and show an awareness of their position in relation to other objects.

#### **STANDARD 3 ~ Measurement**

Children identify and compare the attributes of length, volume, weight, time, and temperature and use the tools needed to measure them.

#### **STANDARD 4 ~ Making Sense of Data/Statistics**

Children classify, organize, represent and use information to ask and answer questions.

#### **STANDARD 5 ~ Patterns/Algebra**

Children identify, repeat, and describe simple patterns using concrete objects.

# Number Sense and Operations

## STANDARD 1 ~ Number Sense and Operations

Children count with understanding; and use numbers to tell how many, describe order, and compare.

### Benchmarks

1. Counts by ones from 1 to 20.
2. Counts the number of items in a group of up to 10 objects and knows that the last number tells how many.
3. Verbally counts backward from 5.
4. Looks at a group of up to 4 objects and can quickly see and say the number of objects.
5. Recognizes and is able to name numbers 1 to 9.
6. Compares two groups (containing up to 5 objects each) and describes them using comparative words, such as: more, less, fewer, or equal.
7. Uses and understands the terms first, last, and first through fifth.
8. Separates a collection of 10 items into 2 equal groups.
9. Gives up to 5 items when requested.

### *Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Set up a math area in the room where children can play with math manipulatives including materials such as Unifix Cubes, rods, pattern blocks, and counting bears.
- Add counting and number books to the library area.
- Make a number line with the children by writing numbers in order from 1 to 10 on a long sheet of paper. Keep the number line up in the room and use it when singing number songs, counting in other languages, etc.

### *Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Provide many opportunities for counting in play. Together, count the number of children in the room, the number of children wearing shoes that tie, the number of stop signs or trees you see on a walk in the neighborhood, etc.
- Practice counting backward. Use body motions such as standing on tiptoes when saying 5 and slowly moving closer to the ground as each smaller number is said, ending by saying 1 while sitting or kneeling on the floor. Use space shuttle countdowns, running races countdowns, etc.
- Count objects or children using the words first, second, third, fourth, fifth.
- Sing counting songs, such as “5 Little Ducks” and use fingers or other objects to indicate the numbers being sung, demonstrating subtraction.
- Use counting and number books, fingerplays, and number rhymes.
- Invite children to help pass out snacks, napkins, and supplies, counting each object as they pass them out.
- Do comparison activities, such as passing out five pieces of paper and three crayons. Discuss with the children which group has more. Use matching and counting to determine if groups have more, fewer, or the same.
- Do cooking activities with children. Write out the recipe so children can read it with you by using both numbers and pictures.

# Shapes/Geometry

## STANDARD 2 ~ Shapes/Geometry

Children identify and describe simple geometric shapes (circle, triangle, rectangle) and show an awareness of their position in relation to other objects.

### Benchmarks

1. Recognizes and names circle, triangle and rectangle (which includes squares.)
2. Builds and describes two-dimensional shapes, such as making circles and triangles with blocks and play-dough.
3. Recognizes that a shape remains the same shape when it changes position.
4. Sorts and matches objects with the same shape and size from their environment, and can lay an object of the same shape and size on top of another to show they are the same.
5. Makes a picture by combining shapes.
6. Can take a shape apart (decompose) to make new shapes, such as finding 2 triangles in a square.
7. Demonstrates and begins to use the language of the relative position of objects in the environment and play situations, such as up, down, over, under, top, bottom, inside, outside, in front, behind, between, next to.
8. Creates 2-dimensional shapes and 3-dimensional buildings that have symmetry.

### *Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Make sure there are a variety of manipulatives of various sizes and shapes, including two and three-dimensional shapes, cubes, pyramids, and objects such tangrams and nesting cups in the math area for children to include in their play.
- Provide many opportunities for children to play in the block area. Talk with children while they are playing about the shapes they are using.
- Set up areas where children can make shapes out of play dough. Talk with children about the names of the shapes they are making.
- Set out trays children can use to sort toys or blocks according to size and shape.

### *Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Provide many examples of shapes with varying attributes: big, small, long, skinny.
- Provide many examples of shapes in varying positions, upside down, turned on its side, etc.
- Provide examples and non-examples: “This is a circle, this isn’t a circle.”
- Talk with children as they play with objects. Point out that shapes remain the same even when turned upside-down or sideways.
- Play games with children that include asking them to put objects “beside”, “next to”, “behind”, “above”, “up”, “down”, “near”, and “far”.
- Give children opportunities to cover an outline with shapes without leaving gaps.
- Have materials available, such as flannel board shapes, paper, or blocks that allow children to combine shapes and create new 2 and 3 dimensional designs.
- Provide experiences breaking apart 2 and 3 dimensional shapes to make new shapes, such as breaking apart a square graham cracker to make 2 smaller rectangles.

# Measurement

## STANDARD 3 ~ Measurement

Children identify and compare the attributes of length, volume, weight, time, and temperature and use the tools needed to measure them.

### Benchmarks

1. Compares length and other attributes of objects, using the terms bigger, longer, and taller.
2. Compares 2 objects by placing one on top of another and says which has more space.
3. Arranges objects in order according to characteristics/attributes, such as height.
4. Identifies and uses measurement tools, such as ruler, scales, measuring cups, thermometer, clock, and calendar.
5. Says that a penny equals 1 cent.

### *Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Provide a water table or large plastic container of water where children can play with measuring cups and containers of varying sizes. Talk about which containers hold more, less, and the same.
- Provide a sand table or large plastic container of sand where children can play with measuring cups and containers of varying sizes.
- Make sure the math area contains a plastic balance scale children can use to compare weights of objects; plastic rulers; stacking toys; nesting dolls; and blocks of various sizes and types. Talk with children about which objects are bigger, taller, longer, etc.
- Set up a play store with a cash register where children can pretend to purchase play objects with real or pretend pennies.

### *Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Build on children's curiosity about money, showing them coins and talking about their value.
- Bring in pumpkins of various sizes; weigh, measure and compare.
- Measure objects around the room with the children. Compare the measurements. Measure using a variety of non-standard objects, such as blocks, crayons, beans, or paper clips.
- Measure the children's height at the beginning of the year and periodically throughout the year. Make a chart to display their measurements and growth.
- Measure children's height with yarn. Compare the lengths of yarn among the children in the program. Talk about which one is longer, shorter, etc.
- Grow plants and measure their height each week. Chart this growth with the children.
- Give children experiences with various measuring devices, such as rulers, balance scales, thermometers, and measuring cups and use the correct names for the measuring tools as you and the children use them.
- Plan cooking/food preparation activities, including the use of measuring cups, measuring spoons, clocks, thermometers, and balance scales.
- Encourage children to place objects on a balance scale and determine if they weigh the same or if one objects weighs more. Also provide opportunities for children to hold two



different objects and determine which one is heavier, and then label one heavier and the other lighter.

- Share pictures and real examples of various kinds of clocks (e.g., analog, digital), thermometers (e.g., dial, mercury column), and scales (e.g., two-pan, produce department/grocery store, bathroom.)
- Provide opportunities for children to play with objects such as wooden unit blocks and plastic Unifix cubes.
- Use words to describe time concepts and sequence, such as yesterday, today, and tomorrow and the routine of the day.
- Give children opportunities to put objects in order according to size, weight, and length, and recognize when an object is out of order.

## Making Sense of Data/Statistics

### **STANDARD 4 ~ Making Sense of Data/Statistics**

Children classify, organize, represent and use information to ask and answer questions.

#### **Benchmarks**

1. Sorts objects onto a large graph according to one attribute, such as size, shape or color.
2. Names the category that has the most, least, or the same on a large graph.
3. Gathers information to answer questions of interest.

#### ***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Set up an area where children can sort a container of objects into groups and have children describe how they chose to sort them, including multicultural items.
- Provide children with a variety of materials with different attributes (color, size, shape, texture, etc.) to play with.
- Set up an area where children can sort objects, such as shapes or blocks onto a large graph. With the children compare which set of objects has more, less or the same. Before removing the objects place a mark on the table representing each object, then discuss the graph with the objects removed. This allows children to begin to see how abstract symbols can represent a real object.

#### ***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Make a large graph by drawing lines on a large sheet of paper or an inexpensive, white shower curtain. Graph often with children, making graphs of things such as children's likes and dislikes of food or activities, type of shoes children are wearing, etc.
- Provide opportunities for children to participate in gathering data about a question, such as "What kind of pets do you have?" Children can place a picture or toy animal on a graph to indicate the type of pet they have. Ask questions about the graph once it is complete, such as "What kind of pet do most of our children have? Which pet do the least children have?"

# Patterns/Algebra

## STANDARD 5 ~ Patterns/Algebra

Children identify, repeat, and describe simple patterns using concrete objects.

### Benchmarks

1. Sorts objects according to one attribute such as size, shape or color.
2. Identifies simple patterns in the context of play or daily activities (such as block, car, block, car) and can use patterns to describe relationships between objects, such as red follows blue.
3. Predicts, repeats, and extends a simple pattern in the context of play or daily activities (dish, spoon, dish, spoon.)

### *Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Provide a variety of objects in the math areas that children can use to make patterns, such as counting bears, small cars, and blocks.
- Provide areas where children can sort objects or household items, such as socks, blocks, crayons, groceries, lids, recyclables, and toys.

### *Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks*

- Point out patterns in the environment, such as patterns in a quilt or piece of native cloth.
- Set up patterns with children using common objects such as red grape, green grape, red grape, green grape, or sock, shoe, sock, shoe, sock, shoe.
- Invite children to extend or continue patterns that have been started, such as red block, blue block, red block, etc.
- Make patterns with the children themselves, such as: boy, boy, girl, boy, boy, girl; or child sitting down, child standing, child sitting down, child standing. Have the children predict what would come next in the patterns.
- Play pattern games with the children, such as clap, clap, tap your toe, clap, clap, tap your toe.
- Encourage children to describe what they did first, next, and last in making their patterns.
- Use play, physical materials, or drawings to model a simple problem (e.g., There are 6 dolls to be shared by 3 children. How many dolls can each child have?)

### *Adaptations for Individual Children*

- Set up centers that encourage children to interact and work together so that peers can model using math.
- Put out toys for math activities that every child can easily pick up and use, such as large beads and blocks.
- Make up songs and use rhythms when counting objects.
- Use objects the child is already interested in to encourage them to play, then prompt or model counting, measuring, weighing, sorting, etc.
- Use snack/meal times to practice counting meaningful objects and comparing amounts by saying, “Take three crackers,” “How many grapes do you have,” or “You have more cookies than he does.”
- Use verbal and physical prompts to help the child classify, count, or measure objects; for example, guide the child’s hand to put a blue square in appropriate container while describing what you are doing.
- Give the child numerals made of various materials while practicing counting so she can hold up the numerals as she counts or place them next to objects for one-to-one correspondence.
- Use familiar items (toothpicks and marshmallows, children’s own bodies) to make shapes.
- Be sure areas for construction are accessible to all children.
- Provide computers with software that promotes and supports active learning and practice with mathematics concepts. Provide adaptive equipment when needed, such as adapted keyboards, voice activation, and touch screens.
- Provide blocks of different shapes and sizes covered with various textures to help children discriminate between shapes.
- Compare sizes of familiar objects in the environment, such as dolls, balls, people, cars, etc.
- Make large graphs out of real objects or the children themselves by having them line up according to a certain characteristic, such as their favorite fruit.
- Break activities down into individual steps, giving concrete, clear directions and prompts.
- Use routines to establish patterns, then delay a part of the pattern to allow a child to fill in the next step; for example, during snack, give each child a napkin, juice, then fruit, and let the child tell you what comes next.
- Begin pointing to and counting objects, then point to the next object to be counted, waiting for the child to provide the next counting word.
- Provide interesting toys (dolls and dollhouse, cars and garages) to help children practice putting things in, out, over, and under.

## Social/Emotional Development and Approaches to Learning



Social/Emotional development is a key component of children's overall growth. Brain research has shown us that the early years in children's lives are critical to their social/emotional development. These early years form the foundation that will be the basis of all future growth. Social and emotional skill development starts at birth, and like all areas of development this area is refined as children grow. The emotional foundations of attachment to caregiving adults are fairly well defined by the time a child is 18 months old (Bowlby, 1990). However, it is never too late to nurture and promote children's social skills and their emotional competence. Early relationships are key to children's later social and emotional competence; forming secure attachments to caregivers is critical. Even children whose attachments to their families are insecure can develop secure relationships with their teachers – relationships that in turn, can support children's positive development and learning. To develop secure attachments children need adults to respond to them and meet their needs in a timely manner. This attachment to a loving caregiver is then like a dance between the child and the adult, with both communicating and responding to each other. Children need to form positive attachments with the adults in their lives to achieve a sense of security. It is important that we spend time with children in our care, responding to their needs and interests, listening and talking with them. This will help them see themselves as individuals who are worthwhile and capable of learning.

Children need warm, responsive, and predictable environments in order to thrive emotionally and socially. Adults can provide an environment that is relatively calm, predictable, positive and stable, with appropriate expectations based on the children's age and development. Play experiences help with the development of pride, joy, and mastery of skills. As children play they learn self-regulation, turn taking, sharing, negotiation, and appropriate ways to express their emotions. Play also helps children to work through situations they may not understand and to explore roles that are unique to their family and culture.

Kindergarten teachers report that children need the following social skills in order to be successful in school: they can wait in line, take turns, respect others' opinions, listen when others

are speaking, and express themselves in an appropriate manner. Children who have a positive sense of self and good problem solving skills are able to transfer that knowledge to their work with math, science and other academic areas.

According to Marilou Hyson in her book, *The Emotional Development of Young Children: Building an Emotion-Centered Curriculum*, there are important issues for us to consider as we scaffold children in their development of emotions. She believes there are several benefits to helping children understanding emotions:

- They are more likely to be sympathetic toward others and help others who are in distress;
- They are more likely to share what they have with others;
- They are generally more socially competent;
- Preschool children who understand others' feelings have better academic and social outcomes.

Hyson outlines the basics of emotional understandings that we want children to know:

1. Everyone has emotions
2. Emotions arise because of different situations
3. There are different ways of showing feelings
4. Other people may not feel the same way I do about everything
5. I can do things to change how I feel and how others feel (p.53).

Children do not instinctively know what emotions they are feeling and how to respond; they need support of more competent peers and adults to help them develop competence. According to Hyson, adults can be positive role models for children, nurture children, influence children in positive ways and share common interests with them. Strong and respectful relationships between caregivers and families also support children's development.

Assistance with the transition from preschool to kindergarten can support children's social and emotional development. We know that helping children make a smooth transition into kindergarten will allow them to continue their social/emotional and academic growth without disruption. Visits to the new school, meeting the classroom teacher, reading books about kindergarten, and talking with children about future changes will help children approach this new milestone with confidence and enhance their enthusiasm for learning. More information on helping children transition can be found in the book, *Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, and School*, by Robert Pianta and Marcia Kraft-Sayre.

#### Organization of Social/Emotional Development and Approaches to Learning Guidelines

We have divided the Early Learning Guidelines in this section into **Social/Emotional Guidelines** and **Approaches to Learning**. These two areas complement each other and will help children in all other areas of development. Some of the benchmarks seem very similar but will help children develop specific skills they need. As with the literacy and mathematics guidelines, the standards and benchmarks are followed by Additional activities which preschool teachers, childcare providers, and parents can use with young children. It is important that all activities we do are developmentally appropriate. It will help children's social/emotional development if the activities we offer them are age, individually, and culturally appropriate for them. We have also included a section with additional techniques for challenging situations for our children who, for a variety of reasons, require more support with their social behavior and approaches to learning.



# Social/Emotional Development

## South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for Social/Emotional Development

**STANDARD 1** ~ Children demonstrate a positive self-concept and self-confidence.

**STANDARD 2** ~ Children demonstrate an ability to regulate their emotions.

**STANDARD 3** ~ Children respect others and recognize and appreciate their similarities and differences.

**STANDARD 4** ~ Children demonstrate pro-social behaviors, social competence and participate cooperatively as members of a group.



**STANDARD 1** ~ Children demonstrate a positive self-concept and self-confidence.

### Benchmarks

1. Identifies self by name.
2. Describes self using several basic descriptors, such as gender and physical features.
3. Takes pride in accomplishments.
4. Adjusts to new situations.
5. Separates easily from familiar caregiver.
6. Demonstrates self-efficacy by exerting independence in play situations and during regular routines.

***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Use authentic materials in the dramatic play area to encourage independence, such as real telephones, pots and pans.
- Set up a safe woodworking area with tools and safety glasses.
- Designate places for toys, blocks, and supplies, such as cubbies labeled with children's names, shelves for art projects, or a treasure box for items from home.
- Include pictures and objects from children's homes, cultures, and families throughout the environment.

***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Read books about families and encourage children to talk about their families. Discuss similarities and differences.
- Provide opportunities for children to identify themselves in pictures and to identify their names from a group of other names.
- Give children culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal indications that you are interested in them, including eye contact, smiles, and spending time with them.
- Provide developmentally appropriate materials and activities to promote learning, such as open-ended art materials, simple and more advanced puzzles, and a variety of blocks.
- Expand on children's ideas and interests; for example, a child's interest in dinosaurs may become the play theme.
- Greet children individually and get them engaged in activities to help facilitate their transitions from home.
- Provide positive role models for both boys and girls when possible. Read books that show positive role models for boys and girls.

**STANDARD 2 ~ Children demonstrate an ability to regulate their emotions.**

**Benchmarks**

1. Uses words to express their needs, wants, and feelings, as well as to identify the emotions of others.
2. Demonstrates knowledge that there are different ways of showing feelings.
3. Recognizes they can do things to change the way they feel and how others feel.

***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Keep the mood positive, creating an environment where children and adults are happy and engaged most of the time.
- Encourage children to identify, interpret, and express a wide range of feelings of self and others by providing books, toys, puppets and activities such as drawing, writing, creative art and movement, and open-ended pretend play.
- Establish a predictable daily routine.

***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Use natural situations that provide opportunities to talk about your feelings, children's feelings, and how their actions might affect the feelings of others.
- Respond to children's verbal and non-verbal expressions of feelings.
- Talk with children about what is causing their emotions.

- Model feelings of frustration, disappointment, expression of needs, etc., and socially appropriate ways to express those feelings.
- Include words that describe feelings as part of children's overall language development.
- Give children something else to do when they have to wait. For example, sing songs, draw a picture, or tell a story.
- Provide techniques to help children learn to relax, stay calm and manage their anger and fears, such as breathing deeply, finding a comfortable spot to listen to music, and using words to express themselves.

**STANDARD 3** ~ Children respect others and recognize and appreciate their similarities and differences.

### **Benchmarks**

1. Can express ways in which others are similar and different, such as eye color, gender, and favorite activities.
2. Plays with a variety of children, regardless of gender, race, or ability.
3. Recognizes that everyone has emotions and that other people may not feel the same way they do about everything.
4. Demonstrates caring and concern for others.
5. Respects the rights and property of others.

### ***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Provide an environment based on respect and caring through teaching, modeling, and guidelines.
- Provide a housekeeping/dramatic play area including a variety of materials that represent a variety of cultures and families, changing props throughout the year.

### ***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Discuss the characters in storybooks, talking about feelings of the characters, similarities and differences in their appearances, etc.
- Encourage a variety of friendships by providing small group play experiences.
- Do activities to help children get to know each other and help them recognize similarities and differences, including discussions on favorite foods, colors, holidays. Graph eye color, hair color, gender, and how they get to school.
- Talk with and listen to children, showing sincere interest about their lives and experiences.
- Provide books and music that depict a variety of cultures and traditions.
- Use music, literature, puppets, and role-playing to help children recognize the feelings of others.
- Invite family members and people from the community who model caring for others to share their cultures, traditions, and talents. Take trips to visit people and places in the community.
- Involve children in projects that help the community, such as recycling, visiting the elderly, and collecting food or other items for those in need.

**STANDARD 4** ~ Children demonstrate pro-social behaviors, social competence, and participate cooperatively as members of a group.

### **Benchmarks**

1. Develops positive relationships with peers and trusted adults.
2. Participates in group routines, and transitions smoothly from one activity to the next.
3. Uses materials purposefully and respectfully and participates in cleaning up and putting materials away.
4. Defends self while respecting the rights of others.
5. Identifies qualities that make a good friend.
6. Plays independently, in pairs, and cooperatively in small groups.
7. Initiates play and knows how to enter into a group of children who are already involved in play.
8. Takes turns, shares, and is courteous to others, using words such as “thank you,” “please,” and “excuse me.”

### ***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Work to develop a sense of community among the children and adults in your setting by reading books, singing and playing together. Allow children to have responsibilities such as setting the table, caring for pets and contributing to the common good.
- Provide plenty of time and opportunity for enjoyable peer and adult interactions during routine times, such as snack time, hand washing, and clean up. Avoid hurrying children.
- Organize space, materials and daily routine to promote independence. Keep supplies on low, labeled shelves and use child-sized items to support choice, caring for and returning materials.

### ***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach These Benchmarks***

- Assume responsibility for establishing positive relationships with every child. Meet children’s needs in a timely manner. Provide children with a sense of personal security and trust.
- Invite children to participate in a variety of small-group activities such as cooking and reading together, and in large-group activities such as circle time and creative movement for short periods of time.
- Provide opportunities for children to play cooperatively in pairs and in small groups to foster friendships.
- Involve children in rulemaking and maintain clear limits.
- Help children initiate play with other children in positive ways. Give children suggestions on how to join play activities with another child or group of children, such as sharing toys and play ideas, offering to help, and giving compliments.
- Establish a transition routine, such as singing or playing a special song which lets everyone know they need to clean up or come to circle by the time the song ends.
- Promote nurturing behavior by encouraging children to help each other, reading books that demonstrate caring, and setting a good example.
- Engage in meaningful conversations with children. Listen to children and follow their lead.
- Encourage and acknowledge children when they use good manners, such as holding the door for a friend and saying “please,” “thank you” and “excuse me”. Model good manners and be sensitive to cultural practices.

- Encourage children to express their needs with words. Model appropriate language, such as "May I please have that toy."

# Approaches to Learning

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## **South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for Approaches to Learning**

**STANDARD 1** ~ Children demonstrate curiosity and eagerness in play and everyday tasks.

**STANDARD 2** ~ Children demonstrate initiative in play and everyday tasks.

**STANDARD 3** ~ Children use problem solving and reflection in play and everyday tasks.

**STANDARD 4** ~ Children use invention and imagination in play and everyday tasks.

**STANDARD 1 ~ Children demonstrate curiosity and eagerness in play and everyday tasks.**

**Benchmarks**

1. Chooses to participate in a wide variety of activities and demonstrates willingness to try new experiences.
2. Asks questions to find answers and wonders why.
3. Demonstrates eagerness to find out more about other people and to discover new things in the environment.

***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Regularly add new materials to the environment that will engage children's interest and encourage them to try new experiences and ask questions.
- Provide children with adequate time to fully explore materials both indoors and outside.
- Provide many opportunities throughout the day for children to be in control of their environment and to succeed in whatever task they are working on.

***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach These Benchmarks***

- Model conversation skills throughout the day. Have rich conversations with children, responding to their ideas, interests, questions, and concerns.
- Encourage children to listen carefully to others, ask questions of one another, share, and compare ideas.
- Talk with children at their eye level and use facial expressions and tone of voice to capture their interest.
- Read stories to children and encourage them to ask questions.
- Communicate that mistakes are accepted and can be fixed by responding calmly, relating to the situation, and offering solutions. For example, if a child spills paint, say, "When I spill something, I clean it up with some wet towels. Let's get some."
- Show genuine interest and curiosity in materials, objects, and activities. Be a role model, showing how to approach new situations and engage in learning.
- Support children's exploration and discovery.
- Combine new materials and activities with familiar ones to allow students to explore changes, and then to return to activities they are comfortable with when needed.
- Let children watch new activities from a distance and participate over time.

**STANDARD 2 ~ Children demonstrate initiative and persistence in play and everyday tasks.**

1. Demonstrates persistence by working towards completing tasks, and sustains attention and focuses on activities
2. Selects and engages in activities, moving independently from one activity to another, and demonstrates self-direction when making choices.
3. Demonstrates self-help skills, including selecting toys and materials to use in activities and returning them when finished.



***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Design the room using interest areas or centers where children can make choices. Organize the environment so that children can choose materials and put them away on their own by keeping supplies on low shelves, using child-sized furniture and materials.
- Create an environment that allows children to independently select materials and activities. Give children long stretches of time to explore and play with materials.

***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach These Benchmarks***

- Establish a daily routine that includes a variety of learning experiences for individuals, small groups, and large groups.
- Individualize activities according to children's interests, temperament, and developmental level.
- Give children plenty of time to play, create, investigate and complete tasks and projects.

**STANDARD 3 ~ Children use problem solving and reflection in play and everyday tasks.**

1. Attempts several different strategies when encountering difficulty during daily routines or in the use of materials.
2. Demonstrates satisfaction or delight when solving a problem or completing a task.
3. Demonstrates thinking skills and verbal problem-solving skills. (Uses self-talk and thinking aloud to solve problems.)
4. Demonstrates resiliency and coping skills when faced with challenges.
5. Seeks help from adults and peers when needed.

***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Set up safe, engaging science activities and experiments that give children opportunities to use their thinking skills.

***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach These Benchmarks***

- Encourage children to seek help when needed. Support children's efforts.
- Talk out loud while solving problems or working through a task to model the problem solving process for children.
- Encourage children to talk out loud as they work through a task.
- Ask open-ended questions as children are working to encourage reflection.
- Help children use conflict resolution skills when they are working through problems with other children. Include talking about the problem, the feelings related to the problem and how to negotiate solutions.
- Teach children the steps involved in problem solving: identifying the problem, generating possible solutions, choosing a solution, trying it out and evaluating how well it worked.
- Acknowledge and celebrate children's successes.
- Teach children relaxation skills, such as deep breathing, slowly counting and relaxing muscles to help them cope with challenges.
- Help children identify coping skills that will help them when feeling stress, such as asking for a hug, holding a blanket and taking a break.

- Encourage children to use mistakes as opportunities to learn alternative solutions and ways to complete tasks.

**STANDARD 4 ~ Children use invention and imagination in play and everyday tasks.**

1. Explores and experiments with a wide variety of materials and activities.
2. Makes independent decisions about which materials to use in order to express their individuality.
3. Engages in fantasy play, taking on pretend roles with real or imaginary objects.
4. Uses imagination to try new ways of doing things and works with materials in creative ways.

***Setting up the Environment to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Set out a variety of art materials that encourage creativity. Change these materials periodically to give children new experiences.
- Add unique objects to the block area to expand play. This could include objects that fit with a theme or project you're working on.
- Incorporate movement and interest into the environment, using such things as fish and other pets, objects suspended from the ceiling, dancing, etc.
- Periodically rotate toys and materials to spark new ideas.
- Encourage divergent thinking by combining unlikely objects and activities.
- Provide a variety of open-ended materials for children to investigate, including boxes, wooden blocks, and safe household materials, etc.

***Additional Strategies to Help Children Reach these Benchmarks***

- Expand children's experiences by exploring new places and introducing them to new activities.
- Encourage children to use materials in unique and creative ways.
- Allow children plenty of time to answer questions.
- Encourage children to ask questions.
- Ask open ended questions that encourage broad, creative thinking; "What would happen if... Why do you think...What could we do... etc."
- Model positive approaches to new experiences. Demonstrate your own creativity and willingness to try new ideas, activities, materials, foods, etc.
- Allow children to lead play, even if it strays from planned activities.

## Additional Techniques for Challenging Situations

There are some children who, for a variety of reasons, will require more tangible supports for good social/emotional development and positive approaches to learning. It is important to remember that all behavior is a means of communication. Children who lack age level skills to express their wants and needs often use their behavior to communicate them. Caregivers are encouraged to explore why a child is having difficulty or exhibiting specific behaviors. First, think about the answers to these questions:

- Is there a physical reason, such as health, vision, hearing, etc.?
- Where is the child developmentally; are there any learning delays?
- What kind of communication skills does the child have; are they sufficient to meet his or her needs?

All of these may contribute to why a child is having difficulty socially or emotionally. If a child is suspected of having delays it may be helpful to work with community resources such as doctors and schools for additional information. For many children, having a safe, nurturing environment, including individualized modifications to the environment, structure and interactions throughout the day, will help them increase self-esteem and confidence. Playing with peers and practicing social skills in a natural setting are also important in helping a child learn to regulate his or her own emotions and to get along with others.

The following are some suggested strategies that work with children who need more supports in these areas:

### **Visual Supports**

This involves providing a visual means, such as pictures, photographs, objects, printed words, etc. so children who do not have good verbal skills or English language skills can point to and/or label feelings, emotions, wants, and needs. Visual supports also provide structure to children who need help with organization or extra time to make transitions. Some examples include:

- Visual daily schedule
- Adapted activities
- Adapted stories and books
- Picture communication book
- Switch/Augmentative systems

These could be produced by low-tech ways such as drawing pictures, taking photos, or cutting out pictures from magazines. Computer software to create picture schedules and communication systems is also available.

### **Adapt the Physical Environment**

- Make sure all children can participate at the same level (for example: children in wheelchairs). Materials such as standers and adapted seating and supports can be used.

- Reduce visual and auditory stimulation. For some children having too much available is distracting.
- Arrange the room into interest areas or centers, using furniture, carpet squares and colored tape to establish boundaries.
- Use timers to indicate transition times, such as clean-up time, lunchtime, etc. Use both visual and auditory types of timers.
- Throughout the classroom, display pictures of feelings and emotions. Have mirrors nearby so children see themselves and practice expressing feelings.

### **Teach calming strategies**

- Counting slowly
- Taking deep breaths
- Going to an adult for comfort

### **Use positive reinforcements to reward good behavior**

- Talk to children about their accomplishments and good behavior.
- Write notes or make phone calls to families to share children's accomplishments and good behavior.

### **Social Stories**

There are numerous children's books that deal with common emotions and feelings such as anger, loneliness, forgetting, etc. One strategy is to read a story to children, such as When Sophie Gets Angry, and then talk to children about whether they ever get angry. The children would then dictate their responses to the adult. Their story would also include ideas as to what we can do when we feel that way. Their stories can be added to the library area. Another way to use social stories would be to write a specific story for specific challenges a child is facing. The story would include pictures to illustrate the words and positive strategies to deal with that situation.

The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding has resources on social stories at [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org).